

Khosravi, Shahram. 2010. "Illegal" Traveller: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 150 pp. Pb.: 37,44 €. ISBN: 9780230230798.

Book review by

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"Illegal" Traveller is an auto-ethnography on borders and migration. The book tells stories of human journeys and "illegal" border crossing in the age of the nation-state. It tells us the story of migrants, refugees, brokers, smugglers, stranded and stateless people across the globe.

Written by Sharam Khosravi, professor of social anthropology of Stockholm University, this book was first published as a continuation of the Global Ethics series by Palgrave Macmillan, the UK publisher. The arrangement of the book is clear and concise. Other than the introduction and coda, the book is divided into seven chapters, each of which depicts not only the story of the author's illegal border crossing but also examines different theories on migration, borders, gender, power relations, refugee crisis, forced migration, necropolitics, colonialism, racism, eurocentrism, corruptions and so on.

The book starts with the story of Fatemeh Kian, who was a 50-year-old Iranian transsexual. She fled from Iran because of her sexual identity and sought asylum in Sweden. However, the Swedish court not only rejected her asylum application but also accused her of fake suicide attempts. Later, Fatemeh committed suicide in the detention centre after several failed attempts to obtain asylum status. Thus, this book starts with a tragic story, ignites readers' minds, and signals what they will explore throughout the book.

Chapter One, *Accustomed Soil*, discusses the author's self-exile from his own country after refusing to join the mandatory military service of Iran. It was illegal, so he had to live a hidden life and become an "illegal" citizen in his own country. Furthermore, to kill the enemy and "martyrdom" was a dominant phenomenon in the society of Iran and was the symbol of manhood and masculinity. Therefore, those not joining the army were socially ostracised and viewed as cowards.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four mainly recount the author's "illegal" journey from Iran to Pakistan, India, and Sweden. The author crossed these countries' borders "illegally" and had terrifying experiences with the border brokers, smugglers, border guards, and from the stories of other refugees. He had been arrested by Iranian border guards in his first attempts to escape Iran. Prison tortures and hospitality from the "criminals" helped him rethink the definition of ethics; the author asserted, 'when injustice and inequality become as pervasive as they are along this border, ethical assessments lose their weight' (p. 21). A few months later, released from prison, the author tried for the second time to leave Iran and succeeded in landing in Quetta, Pakistan. The moment he "illegally" crossed the border, he felt his body become uprooted, his identity and culture were out of place, and this "illegal" crossing transformed him into an "illegal" human being.

After staying eight months in a small hotel in Pakistan, the author flew to India; a few months later, he ended up in the detention centre of Sweden with a fake passport. He received his asylum status after staying six months in the centre. Later, while studying at university in Stockholm, he was shot in the head by a man who hated migrants. This incident transformed him into an "object" of representation in the mass media; his private life became a topic of public interest.

Chapter Five, *Homelessness*, shows the end of the author's "illegal" journey. In 1995, he revisited his parents in Iran but found himself no longer attached to the community and country. His long absence from the Iranian community made him an outsider.

Chapter Six, *We border*, mainly discusses how a visible and invisible border creates barriers for certain "kinds" of people and accepts some people warmly. Body colour is now part of the border scanning. It determines which "body" can easily pass and which "body" cannot. According to Khosravi, today's borders are selective and scrutinise people; the new border likes young and healthy people and dislikes women, the elderly, and children.

In Chapter Seven, *The Right to Have Rights*, Khosravi underscores that human rights are written in the elite's documents but not in practice and never found in the real-life situa-

tions of the people who need it most. Quoting Arendt, the author asserts there is only one human right, and it is the “right to have rights”. The dialectical relations of universal human rights and state sovereignty are discussed in this chapter. The second part of the chapter shed light on “hospitality” with reference to Derrida. The author agrees that he would not have survived without the hospitality that he received from numerous people in his “illegal” border crossing period. In this regard, he argues that among the migrants who will receive hospitality in the host country depends on his passport, adequate bank statements, and social class.

The book ends with the death descriptions of Walter Benjamin; it is the same as the opening of the book, where we learn about the sad death of Fatemeh-kien. Sharam Khosravi affirms that the book is written in a pessimistic tone, in honour of the defeated souls of the border.

The book *“Illegal” Traveler* brings several viewpoints on migration and the refugee crisis. The personal narrative or auto-ethnography is one of the powerful aspects of the book; the storytelling technique with vivid political discussion does not overwhelm the reader.

Throughout the book, there are short stories of sorrow, hopelessness, poverty, insecurity, human rights violations, the blind and dark side of our human civilisation. For example, we see that seminars on human rights were taking place in the five-star hotels of Pakistan, whereas just a hundred metres from in the hotel, migrants were dying, female migrants were raped by the brokers, and similar. Thus, the book continuously raises questions on the hypocrisy of the organisations and institutions working for the welfare of migration and the refugee crisis.

In this book, some compound words, section titles, and comments bring a surreal aspect of life, society and migration crisis and at the same time condemn the present border situation and state security questions. Words like “border rituals”, “body sacrifices”, “border performance”, “migration industry” are examples. In addition, subtle humour and simultaneous pain are present in the book. Undoubtedly, this is a book that any reader will read at once; it opens our eyes to the migration crisis by breaking the dominant stereotype thinking and perceptions.